a view to strengthening and consolidating the close cooperation that exists between the two countries.

BHUTAN

The Prime Minister and His Majesty the King of Bhutan have exchanged letters on a number of occasions since Prime Minister's assumption of office. The letters reiterate the commitment of both countries to continue the traditional unique ties of close cooperation and friendship that exist between India and Bhutan. Government accords high priority to deepening and further extending the wide-ranging cooperation between India and Bhutan.

CHINA

India and China are committed to work towards a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question. The Agreement on Maintenance of Border Peace and Tranquility, signed in 1993, and the Agreement on Confidence Building Measures, signed in November 1996, is contributing to maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas.

Various issues of mutual interest, including the boundary question, are being discussed in the framework of the India-China Joint Working Group and India-China Expert Group. The last meeting of the Joint Working Group was held in Delhi in August 1997. The next meeting of the Expert Group is scheduled to be held in the first week of June, 1998.

AFGHANISTAN

India has close and warm relation with the Government of Afghanistan led by President Rabbani. India's support by way of humanitarian assistance continues.

Trade and Travel Routes Linking North Eastern States to Foreign Countrels

178. SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND:
DR. RANBIR SINGH:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any steps to open up trade and travel routes linking North Eastern States to neghbouring countries; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) and (b) Government has constituted an Inter-Ministerial Task Force to review the entire question of North East Border Trade and inter-country trade. Two meeting of the Task Force have been held so far, on 21 October 1997 and on 19 December, 1997. Studies have been undertaken on the export potential of these states. Related issues such as infrastructure development including transportation, warehousing, banking and customs facilities, etc. are being examined.

Under the terms of a memorandum of Understanding signed in March 1997, India and Myanmar agreed to cooperate with each other in the development of roads along the Indo-Myanmar border. The upgradation work on the Tamu-Kalemyo Road is expected to be completed by the year 2000. The India-Bangladesh Inland Waterways Transit & Trade Protocol, which has been in operation since 1972 and was last renewed upto October 3, 1999, provides transportation links through Bangladesh with the Northeastern States as well as providing trade access with Bangladesh. A Motor Vechicles Agreement with the Government of Bangladesh is being discussed. Such an agreement would facilitate trade and travel between the Northeastern states and Bangladesh.

Agreements with Foreign Countries

179. PROF. RAM KAPSE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state the details of the agreements entered into by Government with various foreign countries of Europe and with America during the last six months, and the areas covered by these agreements?